

Raised by my Motherland

A radio documentary on Lyudmila Matthews, an orphan, a survivor and a witness of Stalin's Great Terror.

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Declaration

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of the MA in [insert your programme name here, eg: Journalism & Media Communications], is my own; based on my personal study and/or research, and that I have acknowledged all material and sources used in its preparation. I also certify that I have not copied in part or whole or otherwise plagiarised the work of anyone else, including other students.

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Abstract

This radio documentary, entitled *Raised by my Motherland* tells the story of Lyudmila Matthews. Lyudmila was a child in the Soviet Union when the series of repressions known as the Great Terror, or the Purges, orchestrated by Josef Stalin gained momentum. The Terror, through killings and forced starvation, resulted in the deaths of millions across the newly established Soviet Union and remains the most problematic aspect of the nations Communist history.

The Terror destroyed Lyudmila's family as her father fell victim to its ravages. *Raised by My Motherland* seeks to situate the story of this initial destruction of the family unit its proper historical context and then explore how Lyudmila, the one remaining survivor of that family navigated life in the Soviet Union as an orphan and experienced the unique nation as it was gradually moulded from above by its totalitarian leader, Stalin and then moulded again by his death.

Lyudmila's story is, considering her old age, a rare one and thus *Raised by my Motherland* places most of its emphasis on her voice as she reflects on her own Soviet Century. This is her account of that phenomenon which erupted in 1917, the memory and influence of which survives to this day, 100 years later.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn momentarily ponders the fate of thousands of Russian children who were orphaned by the imprisonment of their parents in his arch-work, *The Gulag Archipelago*; he dejectedly asks “how many of these kids must there have been even back in the twenties? And who will ever tell us their fate?” (Solzhenitsyn, 1986, p. 276).

I find myself in the privileged position of being able to map out the story and fate of one such child in this, my dissertation by practice- a radio documentary entitled *Raised by My Motherland*.

The child - now an elderly woman residing in London- is Lyudmila Matthews, née Bibikova.

In the midst of the inner Bolshevik party struggles of the 1930s, which culminated in the political mass-murders known as the Terror or the Purges, Lyudmila’s father Boris, a party official was accused of treason and shot in the head by the secret police. Briefly after his arrest and then briefly after his execution, Lyudmila’s mother was arrested and sentenced to 10 years’ hard labour in the Gulag. Lyudmila was barely a child but grew up then in the shadow of this event; spending her childhood in various orphanages, a prison and around collective farms, during World War II she found herself in a massive evacuation, and witnessed the Nazi siege of Stalingrad.

Lyudmila's mother was released from the Gulag in 1948, but she had all but lost her mind, never to recover. Indeed by that stage, tuberculosis had caused great physical damage Lyudmila and she had suffered from severe neglect, she said of those years as an orphan, "Childhood hunger stays with you your whole life, you can never ever feel truly full again," (Matthews, 2008, p. 96).

Life did improve for Lyudmila. She consistently performed well in school and was allowed to attend university in 1952. Less than a year in, Josef Stalin was dead. In the immediate period following his death came what was known as the Thaw; Stalin was denounced by his successor Nikita Khrushchev, the rules around censorship were loosened and the repression, which had been central to Stalin's rule and central to the childhood of Lyudmila, was relaxed.

It is these periods of Lyudmila's life which my documentary will mainly focus on, that initial childhood struggle in the Soviet orphanages, the release of her mother and then that initial experience of the Thaw. There is much more which could have been included, Lyudmila's romance with an English scholar, Mervyn Matthews, which blossomed into a lasting marriage and her subsequent escape from the Soviet Union in 1969 is worth documenting. In the following chapters however, I will outline exactly why that was excluded.

The aim of this radio documentary is first and foremost to convey Lyudmila's story with her own words using the audio footage which I gathered from an extended interview with her. Secondary to that then but nevertheless utterly crucial is to situate this story accurately in its historical context. The documentary is presented as my experience of Lyudmila, and so in the midst of the contextualising, I offer some personal accounts of what talking to her was like for me, and highlight some areas which struck me as particularly profound.

This documentary belongs in the historical genre, however throughout the process of researching it I always envisioned it as oral history, of the same ilk as the aforementioned book by Solzhenitsyn rather than as an academic work of history. I made the editorial decision then to produce it as such.

This form still required rigorous historical research as will be elaborated on in Chapter 2 of this written aspect of the dissertation. That editorial decision to frame it along the lines of

an oral history mainly manifested in the actual production of the documentary, it meant less bombardment of acute historical detail and more space for the human story which - although perhaps occasionally divergent from the academic historical processes - can still tell us just as much. Historian Anne Applebaum writes (2011, p. 12) “that although memoirs cannot be relied on for names, dates, and statistics, they are an invaluable source of other kinds of information.”

On the topic of subjectivity then, another key aspect and aim of this documentary arises which is how I portray the Soviet Union and what type of commentary I offer alongside the testimony of Lyudmila. The Soviet Union is a uniquely loaded topic, ideologically and particularly so from my vantage point as a Western journalist producing a documentary on some of the worst aspects of it. To praise is to produce a documentary for the Left to use; and to condemn is to do likewise for the Right.

The potency of this ideological divide is particularly intense this year due to the centenary of the Bolshevik October Revolution of 1917, a colossal moment in world history which - historians agree that while not entirely responsible for Stalin’s Terror- created the conditions necessary for the Terror and the Gulag to occur. (Conquest, 2008, p. 3).

That Revolution which indeed is also problematic in Russia today, spawned the “ideological confrontation with the West that still resonates.” (MacFarquhar, 2017). Therefore, I decided that I would not try to convey myself as an authority on this period of Russian history. This is true, I have a keen interest in the period but I do not claim to be invested in the subtleties and technicalities of the historical and ideological debate.

Thus, I present myself in my narration, explicitly as someone who is enthusiastic about Lyudmila’s story but ultimately naïve when it comes to the grand scheme of the USSR during the period. In this role I feel that I actively place Lyudmila’s testimony of what it was actually like over any presumptions and predispositions I may have as that Western journalism student creating the piece, thus retaining the intent of the documentary which is to present Lyudmila’s story and her sole experience of the USSR.

Chapter 2: Evidence of Research

Historical Context

Stalin's Russia

Conceiving of and producing my documentary was ultimately a journalistic pursuit. However seeing as the subject matter is so deeply embroiled in history, I considered historical research to have an absolutely central role to its production. Fittingly then, I had to consult a great deal of historical literature on Soviet Russia throughout the whole process and indeed due to great ideological debate on that topic, I had to become aware of the nuances to each side.

I found that during the research stage of production, no amount of engagement with the historiography was too much. As I learned more about Soviet Russia, I found my ideas with regards to interview approach and narration became more enriched and less arbitrary. I understand though that there is a limit to the emphasis which ought to be placed on that research here. With this in mind I will attempt to contextualise historically only that which features directly in my documentary, I feel that to go any further would be unnecessary and detract from the more important journalism aspect of the product.

The documentary predominantly spans over the period of Soviet history commonly referred to as the Great Terror. Much of Soviet history is disputed between camps on the Left and Right, but the Terror is generally accepted even by the left wing socialist historians and writers as a monumental abuse of power, one of the most egregious and systematic periods of political killings right up alongside the Holocaust. "Instead, the months and years that follow will see the revolution embattled, assailed, isolated, ossified, broken. We know where this is going: purges, gulags, starvation, mass murder." (Mieville, 2017, pg.602) Even these words on the Terror were written by the Communist historian China Mieville, a fervent supporter of the Revolution.

What fuelled the Terror was Stalin's paranoia and his megalomaniacal desire for absolute power. Towards the end of Lenin's life and after his death, Stalin secured for himself

monumental power in the party organs due largely to his cunning and skilful political manoeuvring. But the manoeuvring did not stop with his ascension to the head of the party, it was not enough and so he sought to extend the power of his position and transform his role into one of absolute totalitarianism. This time the characteristic political guile was supplanted with boundless brutality and he achieved his end through the repression of his people; peasants, kulaks, factory workers, artists, aristocrats, soldiers, Jews and all of Russia's minorities, even party officials near the top level were murdered in their droves. This was the Great Terror.

Boris Bibikova and the Terror

The subject of my documentary, Lyudmila, found her life changed utterly, changed permanently by the Terror when in 1934 her father, Boris was killed during the repressions and her mother, Martha was arrested and sent to the Gulag. Each murder deserves its story told but what struck me as particularly fascinating about Lyudmila's story was that her father Boris was one of those party officials in the upper echelons, he had been the recipient of the Order of Lenin before he died, a most prestigious award. (Matthews, 2008, pg. 44) Hitherto his fall from grace and into the targets of Stalin's secret police, the Cheka, he had been a prodigious talent amongst the Bolsheviks of his home, Chernigov in the Ukraine.

But talent was not a life-saving commodity during the Terror, as Boris rose in the Bolshevik ranks he gradually became more disillusioned with how it operated, this was his downfall. Lyudmila's sister, Lenina

“remembers that her father came home from work in tears. He threw himself on to the leather sofa in the sitting room and stayed there motionless for a long time, his head in his hands. ‘My propali’ Bibikov said quietly to his wife. ‘We are lost.’” (Matthews, 2008, pg. 44).

Stalin had cultivated in the Russians an acute ear for dissent and very loose lips, they were encouraged to report any sign of ‘suspicious’ activity to the authorities. Regardless of how barbaric the situation became, this mindset prevailed, “And if the Party adopts a decision which one or other of us thinks unjust, he will say, just or unjust, it is my party, and I shall support the consequences of the decision to the end.” (Conquest, 2008, p.112)

Often, the condemning transgression was nothing more than a meeting with a few like-minded associates to give out about the regime. That was all it took for Boris.

In 1934 at a Party Congress he expressed his desire to see the devastating famine of Southern Russia brought under control (Matthews, 2008, p. 42). Between 1931 and 1934, this famine immortalised as *Holodomor* - the Ukrainian words for hunger and extermination- killed 5 million. (Appelbaum, 2017, p. xxiv). The affiliation of Lyudmila's father with the Bolshevik camp critical of their party's approach to dealing with the Holodomor was pitched as "counter-revolutionary Trotskyite organisation and anti- Soviet activity," (Matthews, 2008, pg. 48) in his death sentence.

Boris was arrested and forced to suffer the interrogation methods of the Soviets during Stalin's Terror; the prolonged sessions of sensory deprivation and torture employed by the NKVD, the secret police, were notoriously efficient. Solzhenitsyn speaks of how the toughest were all broken and forced not only to sign false admissions of their own guilt, but to sign NKVD-written statements incriminating their friends and associates. The sessions were brutal, interrogators would strap down their subjects and stand on their genitals until - according (1986, p. 62) to Solzhenitsyn - "you will confess to everything (...) you will slander in the newspaper everything you hold holy." After Boris' admission, he was taken into a room and shot dead. His death altered the fate of his family forever.

Martha Bibikova and the Gulag

Lyudmila's mother Martha immediately became guilty by association as was often the case during the Terror, its a testimony to the rabid zeal and thoroughness of the Stalinist state: assuming guilt based on spousal association. Perhaps her fate was even worse than that of her husband, she was forced to endure a decade in the Gulag, a massive network of prison camps spread across the USSR where manual labour was enforced. The conditions of these kinds of work camps wherever they appear in the world are typically diabolical, the Nazi Concentration Camps come to mind or Australia's refugee internment camps (Bowden, 2003) but historian and journalist Judith Pallot notes (2015, p. 691) that what characterises the Gulag in particular "is that it inflicts a high degree of suffering on prisoners," Martha was one of these prisoners. "In total, the number of people who had some experience of imprisonment in Stalin's Soviet Union could have run as high as 25 million, about 15% of the population," (Appelbaum, 2011, p.11).

The oral historical literature on the Gulag is as harrowing as it is abundant and one can gather from it that as inhumane and traumatic an experience as that which the men were forced to suffer there, the women suffered worse.

Despite the aforementioned abundance of Gulag literature, it pales in comparison to the abundance of testimonies not given, the testimonies of the dead and the traumatised, Lyudmila's mother did not speak of her time there and in the documentary Lyudmila explains her silence with the Russian expression, "shocked for life."

Lyudmila, the orphan

After the loss of her parents, Lyudmila's guardian became the state and her childhood consisted of various children's homes as well as hospitals, she contracted Tuberculosis. Lyudmila's age helped her out in that she was too young to be considered a real threat due to her filial association with Boris and Martha, Enemies of the People. Had she been older, her fate may have been even more grim, these children of the Enemies of the People were dealt with using repressive measures and raised in children's homes run by the NKVD, which resembled closer the prison camps than orphanages (Kuhr, 1998, p. 211). Instead, because she was young, Lyudmila was raised in the regular orphanages, while these were not ran like prisons the standard of life remained extremely low and poverty was rife (Kuhr, 1998, p. 211). Nevertheless, suspicion around Lyudmila was never completely eliminated and during her childhood as she was encouraged to not make reference to her parents in school and rather say she was 'raised by my Motherland'. I used this phrase as the title of my piece, I felt it communicated the essence of the documentary and the essence of Lyudmila's childhood.

Another historical area which the documentary covers is the evacuation of Stalingrad which Lyudmila found herself caught up in as a child. However, I do not feel it necessary to provide much contextual information here but it is important to note that the Nazi siege of Stalingrad which necessitated the evacuation is often considered "the mightiest onslaught in military history." (Gillespie, 1950, p. 888) This was the context in which she found herself.

Lyudmila and the Khrushchev 'Thaw'

Stalin's death in 1953 holds a position of great importance in the piece, due simply to the fact that it was a massive event in Lyudmila's life. The aftermath saw a loosening up of Soviet policy in an era known as the Thaw, one heralded in by Stalin's successor Nikita Khrushchev. The political importance of the Thaw may be easily exaggerated, the repressive systems all remained in place but you can really hear in Lyudmila's voice in the documentary the burst of freedom and relief which came about during the period. It was this era when Stalin was condemned by the party, when Khrushchev made it clear that those Stalinist methods "were no longer permissible" (Sixsmith, 2012, p. 405) and when many of the ugly truths about Stalinism came to light (Conquest, 2008, p. 475).

One of the key features of the Thaw, the one most relevant here is the loosening up of the penal system; mass strikes in the Gulag camps led to the relaxing of camp regulations and this was followed by the mass release of prisoners. (Conquest, 2008, p. 478) One of the natural consequences to this was that a spotlight was turned onto the repressive Stalinist prison camps. More and more inmates got pardoned and were released which led to the dispersal of information about the reality of life inside the Gulag and 'the scale and horror of the penal system became an intolerable embarrassment' (Kochan, 1983, p. 446).

That dispersal and dissemination was gradual, but a watershed moment for Russia and for Lyudmila came with the publication of Alexandr Solzhenitsyn's novella, *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*. The book's impact was massive, exposing the ravages of Stalinism to the Russian masses, "The Soviet Union was destroyed by information, only information. And this wave started from Solzhenitsyn's *One Day*." (Korotich, 2012) Lyudmila expresses in the documentary what a revelation this novella was and how it opened her eyes, I felt it appropriate then to include a quote in my narration, "Beat a dog once, and you only have to show him the whip." (Solzhenitsyn, 2003, p. 50).

On Oral History

I always aimed for my media product to adopt the form of oral history, for a concise and handy definition I borrow that of Valery Raleigh Yow, “oral history is the recording of personal testimony delivered in oral form” (Yow, 2005, p. 3). And essential to the production of a piece of oral history media is “the research method that involves in-depth interviewing.” (Yow, 2005, p. 3). The examples of oral history which inspired me throughout the process belonged to the literary format, the works of Alexandr Solzhenitsyn in which he writes of the horrors of the Gulag and indeed those of Primo Levi, his oral historical account of his time in Auschwitz and the horrors of that death camp proves enlightening and effective in a way wholly different to an academic history book.

A crucial factor behind the effect which these books have had is the fact that there was an awareness for an audience. Solzhenitsyn and Levi write with great artifice, occasionally their written histories veer off into the arena of the poetic, the philosophical, the rhetorical and the entertaining. This is why they struck me and I wished to infuse my documentary with that unique ingredient of oral historical media.

Opting for the radio documentary

After deciding that Lyudmila Matthews would be the focus of my dissertation I had to consider which documentary format would most effectively stage her story and I resolutely stand by my decision to opt for the radio documentary.

Before arguing for the radio format I will first elicit my arguments against the video documentary. The video documentary is undoubtedly an effective medium, but the constraints placed by the dissertation guidelines would absolutely inhibit the effectiveness of Lyudmila’s story. Firstly, her story cannot effectively be told onscreen, as aesthetically it is impossible to capture. This is a story of derelict Russian cities, starving children and political violence and repression, of a bygone era.

These elements cannot be captured on video now so whatever images which could be presented in a video documentary would always disappoint when considered in conjunction with that story. Indeed the duration restraints would also greatly hinder the story, Lyudmila’s tale is an epic one which spans decades and to condense that into a 5-10

minute piece would be a grave disservice. Indeed it would mean sacrificing quality material in favour of a brief narrative that would fail to capture the story's essence, the antidotes and opinions which bring it to life.

This leads me into the reasons for radio, the dissertation by practice allows for a much greater documentary length when the radio format is opted for. This is what I as a producer prefer, a story like Lyudmila's is most effective when it is allowed time to develop at its own pace and this benefits the documentary overall because the audience is permitted time to reflect with frequent interludes of music.

Another reason for my chosen format was the stylistic choices it allowed me to make, stylistic choices informed by engagement with other radio documentaries as well as podcasts. Hitherto this process I was a fan of the medium by an audience member but in creating the documentary I became a fan of it also as a producer.

One source of inspiration which I drew on frequently was the documentary archive entitled *Home of the Brave* (Carrier, 2015) which is available on iTunes. *Home of the Brave* is a collection of radio documentaries created by Scott Carrier who was a regular contributor to the popular radio series *This American Life* (Glass, 2017). I found in Scott Carrier's work an artistic and journalistic tradition which I felt I could add to with my own piece, *Raised By My Motherland*. I will expand on how I attempted to follow in the tradition of these producers in Chapter 3.

Identifying a suitable platform for the piece

A significant chunk of the research process for *Raised by my Motherland* was dedicated to identifying a reason for its creation. I state throughout this thesis that one of the biggest motivating factor in producing the documentary was that it granted me the opportunity to have Lyudmila Matthews' story told and I stand by this but it is necessary that this be reinforced with evidence that there is room for the documentary i.e. that it is not merely another drop in the ocean and that the documentary itself adds to the the discourse surrounding its subject matter - growing up in the USSR during the Great Terror; and that the documentary is viable in terms of a market and an audience and is relevant in the radio production landscape of today.

Being a fan of the radio as a medium, in the past few years most of my listening has shifted towards podcasts. The podcast essentially fulfils the same role as a radio broadcast, differing only in that one downloads or streams the podcast online rather than tuning into the radio, the medium is extremely accessible for the modern in that the audio pieces being uploaded as podcasts now take an episodic form and can be listened to, skipped over or re-listened to at the listener's pleasure and one cannot really miss a broadcasted show or documentary because it exists in the online catalogue, ready to be downloaded at any time. It is easy to see why the podcast has become so popular in the media landscape of today, "From its humble beginnings in 2003, podcasting has become an unstoppable force in content marketing and shows no signs of stopping — the number of active podcasts has skyrocketed since 2008." (Nastor, 2016).

In podcasting today, one of the leading platforms is the website Patreon and as a user of the site, I was keen to investigate the viability of it as a platform for my documentary. The Patreon model is simple, creators publish their audio productions on the website and charge their listeners monthly for access to it, out of this charge Patreon takes a 5% commission. The service is open for creators all over the globe to use but one of the most successful podcasts on the platform is in fact Irish, the *Second Captains* podcast which draws in \$5.35 monthly from over 9,000 patrons. (Patreon, 2017).

A listenership of this size is not nearly unique to the *Second Captains* as Patreon subscriptions have seen exponential growth over the last several years. Patreon's growth has rendered the production of podcasts and pieces of audio content for publication on the website rather than for broadcast on radio a more enticing option for creators. "It's now on track to pay out \$150 million to creators in 2017, which would make its 5 percent cut equal \$7.5 million in revenue. That's after paying out \$100 million total since 2014." (Constine, 2017) What is equally encouraging is Patreon's reaction in the light of its recent controversy surrounding its commission when a planned change in policy gathered negative attention. The policy change was to involve removing the 5% commission from content creators and shifting the charge onto subscribers who would give Patreon an additional 2.9% of their subscriptions as a service fee on top of a \$0.35 charge. (Rowe, 2017).

Creators and subscribers alike reacted badly to the plan, seeing it as devastating to the credibility of the organisation and simply a move which seemed to damage all parties.

(Barkho, 2017) Yet Patreon abandoned the policy after the backlash, listening to the criticism of its users, indicating a tactfully run business which genuinely holds in consideration its creators and users for without either of them, it could not exist. Clearly then, truly promising opportunities exist for producers of radio content outside the realms of radio, in the podcast medium.

In producing my piece I had to be very aware of the features of those audio productions which have availed of these opportunities and become successful and try and incorporate them into my own piece, in effect identifying the niche to which *Raised by my Motherland* could potentially belong to. Two podcasts in particular I found particularly enlightening in this regard, Dan Carlin's (2017) *Hardcore History*, and *This American Life*. The former is a drip released, sprawling podcast which delves into historical events and periods with enormous depth. The latter differs greatly, *This American Life* is the well-known series of radio documentaries hosted by Ira Glass, it is simultaneously broadcasted on the American radio channel, NPR but exists also as a podcast. Rather than adopting the approach of *Hardcore History*, one of extended and nuanced discussions surrounding historiography, full of rhetorical asides, *This American Life* focuses heavily on production values, music plays a key role in their productions as well as narration and typically they tend to land themselves more in the human interest bracket rather than the educational/history bracket. Crucially however, both podcasts find themselves "ensconced in the upper reaches of iTunes' most-downloaded list" (Hart, 2015).

I gathered from this that there were ingredients to both which appeal to listeners en masse, the historical discussion of *Hardcore History* and the storytelling-through-production aspect of *This American Life*. The mere presence of these ingredients in my own piece would not be enough, quality is of course the determining factor, but this research into podcasts allowed me to identify early on the niche to which my documentary would belong, which served as a guide as to what my piece should aim for.

Chapter 3 - Contrsucting/Designing the Product

Securing the Interview

A stroke of luck was what initially pointed me towards Lyudmila Matthews. Liam Loather, a relative of mine lives in Pimlico in London and works as a carer for the elderly in that area. Liam was aware of my interest in Russian novels and Russian history and so he informed me in 2016 of this woman who he worked for, Lyudmila. He told me first about how she had an almost encyclopaedic knowledge of the history of Russia, it being her home country and that she was delighted to hear that he has a nephew, myself, that shared those interests with her. The next time Liam paid a visit he came with two books that she told him to give to me, Owen Matthews' *Stalin's Children* and Mervyn Matthews' *Mila and Mervusya*, her son and husband respectfully. Between them, these books told Lyudmila's life story, at the time I had been pondering the prospect of various topics for this thesis and after reading the two books, I felt that I had finally stumbled upon the topic which suited me best.

With that, I went to London in November 2016 and visited Lyudmila, she is an elderly lady but in full possession of her faculties, I approached her with my idea to produce a radio documentary on her experience of the USSR and she immediately agreed, her whole life was contained in the two books so was not hesitant to share it again. Between that point and the Summer of 2017 I remained in contact with Lyudmila through my uncle Liam, passing e-mails via him and we organised two interview sessions for the summer. The first of these was merely preliminary, more of an ice-breaker than anything because I had not seen her in a few months and I felt it was important for me not to just spring upon her with my recorder and dive straight into the in-depth interview. I had a long and casual discussion with Lyudmila about her life and about Russia just so I could get an idea of what kind of interviewee she would be. The second session a few weeks later was recorded on a Tascam DR- 40, I edited this using GarageBand and with the addition of my own narration and music, this is what constitutes *Raised by my Motherland*.

Narration Style

Ethical difficulties arose during the editing process in how I provided a suitable context with my narration for Lyudmila to elaborate her views, this is her story and I wanted her standalone beliefs and conclusions to be expressed. I simply wanted to avoid imbuing the piece with my own beliefs as to do so would immediately be a breach of trust with my interviewee, the documentary ought to be about her.

As a journalist student of the West however, “tensions between Russia and the West frequently intrude into the research process, especially when it comes to a topic as ideologically charged as 1917.” (Kritika, 2015) So in order to remove whatever latent ideology that I may subconsciously express I had to completely delegitimise my voice at the end of the documentary, and I did so through careful narration. In the narration which brings up this topic of 1917 I expressed a leading presumption that Lyudmila would be critical of any commemoration of the 1917 Russian Revolution or would consider it disrespectful, but Lyudmila’s own opinion on the topic was much more nuanced than this and clearly the opinion of one who had lived in the actual wake of 1917, experienced its outcomes both positive and negative. So when she corrects me and states how she really feels about it, I as the narrator and the student of the West come off not as someone engaged in a debate or one with political arguments to make but rather an uninformed individual who is being educated on what Lyudmila has to say. When she finishes I offer no rebuttal, she gets the last word.

This was how I tried to eliminate any political leanings I may have as to include them would be unethical and a betrayal of sorts against Lyudmila, I would then be using her story as political ammunition rather than presenting her story as the centrepiece.

With regards to my own narration I found that in listening to the documentaries of Scott Carrier again I could identify something to strive towards. Carrier plugs himself into the stories, not as an authoritative figure but as one who bares witness, he is not afraid of the struggle to come to terms with his subject matter and uses that struggle in his narration, the result is more nuanced and engaging piece which strikes the listener due to how far it seems to deviate from a strict and rigorous narration in which the narrator dictates the piece authoritatively.

In Carrier's documentary *The Rebel Yell* this technique is used to great effect, the piece documents his trip to the Republican Primaries in America, Carrier's political leanings tend far greater to the Left but in this documentary we are treated to no Leftist dogma or judgemental kicks against the Right, rather Carrier presents (2015) himself as an individual who sees the good in both and by the end of the brief documentary, the overriding feeling is ambivalence and a sense that one cannot really ever be objectively correct when it comes to choosing their politics because there are so many subtleties to the other side that they miss out on. Seeing as my documentary's subject matter was so ideologically charged, this ambivalence in tone was something I considered imperative in achieving.

When it comes to the actual character of my narration, literature proved to be one of the most profound influences and seeing as this documentary falls into the genre of oral history, literature of the oral historical ilk. While I am the furthest thing away from a Solzhenitsyn or a Primo Levi, I wanted my narration to contain an element of that poetic finesse which so lights up with life their inherently dark oral histories on the Gulags and Death Camps, on some of the worst conditions imaginable. In Primo Levi's *If This is a Man* the reader is treated to both an almost scientific gaze on the daily life, the minutiae of the death camp at Auschwitz and in this regard the prose is extremely functional and direct, yet frequently the reader faces brief rhetorical breaks in which the style of writing morphs into something more poetic and compelling,

For human nature is such that grief and pain - even simultaneously suffered - do not add up as a whole in or consciousness, but hide, the lesser behind the greater, according to a definitive law of perspective.

(Levi, 1959, pg. 82)

This example of the carefully crafted and deeply considered style of Primo Levi has the effect that I wanted to achieve with my narration. I understand that one can go too far with this and that the radio documentary is not a piece of art but rather a media product with a primary role of informing but still I made at least the attempt of achieving with my narration something which does stray from the purely utilitarian.

Use of Music

Clearly Scott Carrier's influence was profound. One of his pieces, *An Introduction to Charles Bowden*, deals with the legacy of Bowden, a writer, journalist and activist who had recently died. I found it particularly moving because of its pacing, there are no more than three elements to it: narration, interviewee testimony and music. It moves slowly but it is a purposefully considered pace, allowing the listener appropriate intervals of meditation on the poignant subject matter. When Carrier uses music he does so to great effect, using music of particular relevance to his subject. Throughout the piece he plays (2015) excerpts from Neil Young's score of the Jim Jarmusch film *Dead Man*, music which conjures up images of the Appalachian Trail which was a profound influence on Charles Bowden and his work; and then near the end of the piece Carrier includes (2015) a song which his friend Bowden was a fan of, a particular cover of John Lennon's *Imagine*.

Contextually, my piece differs greatly from this Scott Carrier-produced radio documentary but I applied these techniques employed by the producer to my own; instead of conjuring up images of Appalachia with music, it was my task to conjure up images of the Russian steppe and of the ravages of the Soviet Union. Following on from Carrier in this regard I had to source suitable music to patch into my piece, the natural choice was 20th Century Classical Russian music, the music of this era.

The quality, diversity and effectiveness of this music is well-known, it has been utilised as the soundtrack to some of the last century's greatest films: Sergei Prokofiev's scores of the Eisenstein films *Alexander Nevsky* and *Ivan the Terrible* have been memorialised as some of the all time great film music (James, 2007).

For my documentary I borrowed from the household names of Russian Classical music of the 20th Century; Igor Stravinsky, Dmitri Shostakovich and Sergei Rachmaninoff. It was through the video format that I became aware of the power of Rachmaninoff's music in documentary, having watched the BBC broadcast, *The Joy of Rachmaninoff*, one of the pieces included in that BBC documentary, *Fate*, I made extensive use of, utilising it to portray the grimness and despair of the Soviet children's homes in which Lyudmila found herself. Perhaps the key piece of music in my documentary is the piece which concludes it, a song which Lyudmila introduced me too during my interview with her, the Revolutionary Ballad, *We Fell Victims*. My piece closes with her discussing the piece itself so I felt that having it score her narration was wholly appropriate and indeed tonally it served as an effective way to close off the documentary.

Interview Style

After engaging with several radio documentaries I began to understand also that in terms of the stylistic aspect of the documentary, the form of the interview plays a significant role. This is clear even from the basic fact that in a documentary such as this which focuses on one person, the actual interview with the person adopts the most space. With this in mind I structured my interview in a way that would elicit sprawling, conversational responses from my interviewee, Lyudmila. I felt that these responses would be the most effective, and this is evident in successful radio documentaries of the genre, documentaries which focus on those who suffered or witnessed suffering.

In *An American Life*, a documentary produced by Erica Heilman, we hear the story of Vaughn Hood in his own words. Hood was an elderly barber who had fought in Vietnam, he gives the impression of being a very personable and unassuming man who has lived a good life and has settled well into himself, but over the course of the documentary we learn of the depravity of that conflict in the things that he witnessed, suffered and was ordered to do. At several points he breaks down in tears, disturbed still by those memories. *An American Life* is extremely affecting and this is primarily due to the structure of the interview. What I took from it is that if an interviewee is allowed to speak, and afforded the patience to expand on what they have just said they can arrive at profound moments of narration both compelling and insightful. The effect on the listener is heightened too because they are taken on that narrative journey, digesting the interviewee's train of thought as it develops and investing in the drip fed story. In one passage of the interview with Vaughn Hood, the listener is taken from the nickname of his squad, through the death toll and all the things he witnessed and we arrive at a profound moment of anger as he ruminates on how an ordinary man like himself could end up as a soldier in the horrific war. (Heilman and Massett, 2015) I wanted this element to feature in my documentary, I wanted these longer passages of the interview which feature the ruminations of Lyudmila, her reflections rather than just an answer based approach that just tries to fit as much information in as possible.

Ethical questions surrounding Objectivity/Subjectivity

An immediate ethical challenge arises with this piece in that I, as the journalist creating it, cannot verify every word uttered for the duration. In truth, it may all be lies. This challenge did disturb and almost deterred me from doing this piece during the early stages of its development yet it was common sense and consultation with academic literature which opened my eyes and rendered that challenge a superficial one.

The fact that there have been thoroughly researched books, Owen Matthews' *Stalin's Children* and Mervyn Matthews' *Mila and Mervusya*, written about Lyudmila certainly added credibility to her testimony as it was often backed up by the literature but these books were written by family members so bias had to be considered. However, absolute verification and uniform statistics is not the *raison d'être* of the oral history media product. I have stated that it is Lyudmila's opinions, her subjective experience of the USSR which was the crux of this documentary and indeed while the stories she offers are historically sound, even if something is manipulated or misremembered slightly it is of no huge consequence because "even 'hard' contemporary statistical data is only what somebody told somebody and if they have good reason and the opportunity to conceal the truth, then the facts will be erroneous." (Lummis, 1987, p. 75).

This standpoint is perhaps a cynical one but it remains valid, holes can be picked and routinely are in all fields of history and journalism, the post-truth saga which surrounded the American Election of 2016 attests to this. Indeed while this question must be addressed here in the ethics section, having expressed my aim of documenting Lyudmila's experience alone, it only pertains loosely to my documentary for even "untrue" statements are psychologically "true" and (...) errors in fact may be more revealing than factually accurate accounts.' (Yow, 2005, p. 22).

To adopt this approach entirely would have damaged my documentary however as truth ought to be strived for in journalism. Nevertheless, it did allow me to get past the question of the fallibility of my interviewee because I combined that approach with the rigour of journalistic standards and indeed the historical method, I included in my documentary only what was corroborated by common historical consensus and which seemed the most reasonable given the historical context but I kept that maxim of Lummis in mind in order to

not allow myself to get completely lost in the impossible pursuit of backing up every single detail which allowed me to focus more on the actual production of this documentary.

Another ethical problem which frequently proved a challenge came with regards to political ideology. I felt it utterly essential when producing this documentary that I not use Lyudmila's own personal story in a way that could be used as ammunition for either the Right or the Left on the political spectrum, I did not want it to belong in either of those camps but exist rather as merely a human story.

This ethical challenge however was especially difficult to manoeuvre due to the nature of its subject matter, it is wrapped up in all matters Soviet which exists as one of the cruxes of political divide between the Left and Right. It is a subject matter inherently burdened with those tensions and embroiled in conflicting ideology. This ethical matter of wishing to remain objective came to its head in the closing stages of the documentary when Lyudmila speaks of the centenary and commemoration of the 1917 Russian Revolution, the event responsible for “spawning an ideological confrontation with the west that still resonates” (MacFarquhar, 2017). In one sense I could have avoided this particular topic but as a producer of a piece for radio I felt that the benefits of addressing it were too strong.

For one it is a topic which is extremely relevant, the nature of the 1917 Russian Revolution's commemoration has been discussed across the media spectrum this year and we have seen numerous stories in news publications addressing it as well as a whole host of documentaries on the subject being aired on various BBC Television channels and indeed on BBC Radio. Another reason for me addressing the topic was that I felt it was such a strong way to conclude the documentary, giving Lyudmila her last word on something which she experienced so closely and to close the chapter on her Soviet century. I believe I managed to navigate this ethical issue through my use of narration by removing the validity of my voice as an authority on the matter, this has been expanded upon above in the Narration Style section.

Chapter 4 - Discussion

Argument for the Justification of this Documentary

Identifying a platform and a niche for my documentary was important during the production stage of *Raised by my Motherland*, but the challenge of justification remained; I had to ensure that within that context of platform and niche the documentary would be relevant and add to the discourse. In this year of the centenary of the 1917 Revolution, it was essential that my documentary contribute to the discourse on the USSR rather than just follow a set formula. Solzhenitsyn again was encouraging in this regard as he helped me understand what a unique interviewee with regards to storytelling I had in Lyudmila, discussing orphans - such as Lyudmila - of political enemies, he writes (1986, 276) “how many of these kids must there have been even back in the twenties? And who will ever tell us their fate?”

This was one of the major decisions in my placing Lyudmila’s personal testimony of her childhood as the crux of my documentary when I could have used it as a tertiary element behind a historical account of the Great Terror or Stalinist Russia. The documentary in that case would have lost its major selling point which is essentially the voice and story of one of those orphans Solzhenitsyn speaks of. Yet in situating this story within the context of the modern landscape I had to consult contemporary media discourse to further identify which areas to focus on in my documentary in order to heighten its relevancy and ensure it tackled areas which still facilitate fresh discussion.

One area which could not be ignored was the 1917 Russian Revolution and its centenary, as we saw in 2016 with the centenary of the Easter Rising, using that commemoration as an impetus to produce media on the topic allowed a vast outpouring of documentaries which were consumed and discussed at length throughout the whole year. Throughout 2016, these documentaries were ‘at the heart of RTÉ Radio 1’s schedule’ (RTÉ, 2016, p.

33). Thus the 1917 Centenary provided a unique opportunity to create a product of relevance.

The form of *Raised by my Motherland* was greatly influenced by this aspect of coverage of the Centenary also. If the topic deserves more attention then naturally in the production of a documentary, one ought to create something that would garner wider attention. Indeed this proved to be an issue in Russia, “The President shunted the anniversary off into the realm of academia, appointing a special committee to organise seminars and the like.” (MacFarquhar, 2017) With this in mind I attempted to produce with my documentary something much more accessible than what can be found in the arena of academia, it affected all aspects of my piece.

I focused making sure that the basic ingredients alone were present to contextualise Lyudmila’s story rather than the advanced historical details. Aesthetically the documentary took on a different form also, instead of including reams of information which would have been difficult to follow by listeners unversed in this period of history I slowed it down, making room for the more affecting anecdotes and using bold and vivacious Russian music to assist in the pacing. All this was done in an attempt to create something which was designed for the common listener rather than the scholar. To create a piece designed to appeal to the latter would have been futile as I do not belong to that realm of academia, thus I could not produce something effective and informative for that audience and also, it simply would have become unsuitable as a piece of radio which ought to be enjoyed while also being informative.

Research on the media and public discourse on the Russian Revolution and the saga which followed pointed me to the areas in which there was a dearth of informative documentary content, areas which I would focus on in my own production. “Russians are encouraged to see history as a long list of achievements, with darker elements such as Stalin’s Purges and the Gulag brushed to one side,” (Walker, 2016). With this in mind I could structure my interview and editing in way that capitalised on the opportunity I had to simply document Lyudmila’s first-hand experience of what is now Russian history and to elicit from her, direct and blunt testimony of the way in which these ‘brushed aside’ aspects of Soviet Russia affected her life. I was keen on not directing that brush the other way however for if I did, the history would be reduced to merely a long list of tragedies,

Lyudmila's experience of the Soviet Union cannot be reduced to that, she makes it clear that alongside the neglect there were still positive aspects to life, for example the Thaw period which she mentions in the documentary. This became a major aim of my documentary, to present an account of life in Soviet Russia which focuses not rigidly on the positive aspects or the negative, but rather a concoction of both.

Interviews

I was thrilled to have Lyudmila as the sole interviewee and subject of my documentary, nothing was off limits in our discussions and I found her absolutely compelling. The one inconvenience of it all was that in order to speak to her, I had to make the journey over to London. I made this journey three times and after every trip I worried that travel was accounting for too much of the time spent on this dissertation but now, having completed it I am delighted that I did make the effort to secure the interview, I feel it was worth it.

Initially when planning the project, I had wanted to include another interviewee. Judith Butler, a Professor of Russian History in UCD was my target and I even reached out to her and she agreed to take part. The plan was for her to feature sporadically throughout the documentary, offering historical context. However, I disbanded this idea as the documentary is primarily about Lyudmila, and on that topic even Judith Butler is not an authority, only Lyudmila. Indeed as I mentioned in the previous chapter, I also wanted to avoid having the documentary over-saturated with advanced academic content so I felt that while Judith's contributions would have undoubtedly been insightful and compelling, they were unnecessary here.

Conclusion

Lyudmila Matthews life story is a fascinating one to me. For some unknown reason I am predisposed to the Russian character, Russia's art and literature and its History so I am exceptionally lucky that I managed to capitalise on that interest with my thesis.

Yet, I believe I have argued that one need not have a particularly strong interest in Russia itself to enjoy *Raised by my Motherland*. Its target audience has been identified, primarily people who enjoy podcasts which deal with history in general but crucially, ones which place at its centre the storytelling aspect.

Every aspect of creating this documentary were the root of a lot of difficulty but also a lot of pleasure. Situating the story within the historical context was a particularly challenging process as one can never really know how much context is too much or too little.

There is, I believe, also a lot more room to expand upon with this documentary. There is a whole other aspect to Lyudmila's story which was wholly neglected here: the dramatic episode surrounding her marriage and subsequent escape from the Soviet Union. However, I feel entirely justified in neglecting this aspect, I have never deviated from my aim of presenting Lyudmila's story and I felt that if I were to include this aspect, the documentary would become Lyudmila and her husband Mervyn's story and Mervyn was not the one who was orphaned in his youth by the Terror.

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